

HOLDING HANDS WITH THE POPE

The Current Evangelical Ecumenical Craze

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Have Bible-believers been in error for centuries in refusing to recognize the Roman Catholic Church as a part of the true Church of Christ? Did the martyrs of old die in vain as they protested the false teachings of the "mother of harlots," and were burned at the stake for their efforts? Were Hugh Latimer, John Knox, and Martin Luther simpletons who failed to recognize the marvelous benefits of ecumenism and who, instead, boldly attacked the multiplied errors of Rome?

Strange things are happening today in Christendom. Many odd "winds of doctrine" are blowing about, threatening to sweep God's people away from their time-honored principles and God-revealed truths.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO ROME

One observer has called it "the most significant event in almost 500 years of church history."¹ It was the signing of a declaration entitled, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." Involving, as it did, both evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders, it was truly a monumental statement. Signed March 29, 1994, in New York, it was an ecumenical document of supreme importance since it represented a combined effort by leading spokesmen to "bury the hatchet," ignore important theological differences which have existed for centuries, and work together as "teammates" instead of antagonists.

Who were the signers? One of the chief architects of the document was Richard John Neuhaus, a prominent author and former Lutheran theologian. His conversion to the Roman Catholic Church about four years ago made headlines in the evangelical press. In explaining his defection, Neuhaus stated that "the purpose of proclaiming justification through faith which seemed in the sixteenth century to necessitate a division, no longer warrants division."²

In addition to Neuhaus, other evangelical luminaries signed the document. Among them were:

Bill Bright of Campus Crusade
Mark Noll of Wheaton University
Charles Colson, President of Prison Fellowship
John White, President of Geneva College and former president of
the National Association of Evangelicals

J. I. Packer, noted British author
Jesse Miranda, leader in the Assemblies of God
Pat Robertson, television preacher and evangelical political leader
Richard Land, Southern Baptist official
Larry Lewis, Southern Baptist official
Archbishop William Murphy of Boston
Archbishop Francis Stafford of Denver
Cardinal John O'Connor of New York

What did it say? The document attempts to broaden the definition of the word "Christian" to include as many as possible, notably Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox adherents, and Protestants outside the evangelical camp. It is mainly concerned, however, with relationships between Roman Catholics and evangelicals. It laments the division between them and proposes a moratorium on Catholic/evangelical conflict.

In defending the position that Roman Catholics are true believers along with evangelicals, it is argued that both camps accept the Apostles' Creed. How the acceptance of the Apostles' Creed would make one a Christian is not explained. The intellectual acceptance of any creed, no matter how correct, will not save one soul.

The document warns against "sheep stealing." It declares, "It is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community." In other words, we are no longer to make concerted and earnest efforts to win our unsaved Roman Catholic neighbors to Christ. They are already Christians so why bother? The impact of such a notion upon evangelism and world-wide missions is readily apparent.

Acceptance and fellowship between evangelicals and Roman Catholics is also justified on the basis that both believe in salvation by grace. For the Catholic, however, salvation by grace refers to that divine grace which is mediated through the Roman Catholic sacraments administered by a duly-ordained priest of Rome. The evangelical (or biblical) concept of grace is that it is unmerited favor which is received by faith alone. There is a vast difference between the two concepts.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF COMPROMISE

How in the world did respected evangelical leaders come to such conclusions as described above? What has happened, or is happening, in Christ's Church today that could possibly account for such obvious departure from time-honored positions?

The lengthened shadow of a man. Much of the current theological confusion with regard to the Roman Catholic Church can be laid at the feet

of one man--Billy Graham. Almost a living idol to large numbers of evangelicals, Graham more than any other single person is responsible for leading the evangelical community into a more cozy relationship with the Church of Rome. Many years ago he began to play up to the Catholic hierarchy. He received an honorary degree from Belmont Abbey, a Roman Catholic institution. He has sought the cooperation of the Roman Catholic leaders in metropolitan areas where he has held campaigns. He has sent the converts of his meetings back to Roman Catholic churches. He has publicly honored and praised Roman Catholic leaders. He has failed to warn of the terrible and unbiblical doctrines of Rome. Since Billy Graham sees no problem in having spiritual fellowship with the Roman Catholic Church, and since his influence is very great among evangelicals, is it any wonder that others have followed his lead?

The erosion of strong doctrinal commitment. In his notable work, No Place for Truth, David Wells wonders in the subtitle, "Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?" He gives abundant evidence of a fact that has been observed by many for years--doctrine is no longer of prime importance to many evangelicals. Emphasis has shifted in recent years to "shared experience" as a common ground for fellowship rather than common doctrinal convictions. "Everybody that loves Jesus" should get together without regard to doctrinal distinctions. Evangelicalism as a whole has been stricken with a bad case of the "warm fuzzies." "If a Roman Catholic loves Jesus, then I should embrace him as a brother in Christ." This is the common view of many.

The charismatic factor. It is interesting that, in reporting the signing of the ecumenical document, the "National and International Religion Report" commented: "What brought the two communities together to this point, some signers said, are the experiences of worshipping together in the charismatic movement . . ."³ This is but another evidence of the impetus toward ecumenism which has been generated by the modern charismatic movement. Charismatics find common ground in their shared experience and see no doctrinal impediment to full cooperation with one another. Charismatics seem to be able to span the widest theological gulfs with no problem whatsoever.

Common political causes. In recent years Roman Catholics and evangelicals have made common cause in the political arena, uniting their forces in struggles over the abortion issue, homosexuality, etc. These joint efforts have brought together leaders from both sides who had never worked together previously. Personal friendships have been formed, and, as a result, serious doctrinal differences have begun to be down-played. Since there is agreement on some social issues, and since these issues are so important in the life of America today, many leaders on both sides are willing to minimize doctrinal conflicts on the plea that we need to cooperate in "saving America."

HAS THE LEOPARD CHANGED ITS SPOTS?

Has the Roman Catholic Church changed? Are Bible-believing Christians now free to join hands with Rome? Should we lay aside our "bigotry" in favor of a more magnanimous attitude?

In 1962, the 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church was convened by Pope John XXIII. It was one of the most momentous religious gatherings of the century. An aggiornamento (a refurbishing) of the Roman Catholic Church was projected. The Church was to be adjusted to the changing conditions of the times. Many structural, procedural, and liturgical changes were made in order to improve the image of the church in the eyes of the world, and to make it seem more tolerant and open. Ever since this historic gathering was held, many evangelicals have had the perception that the Roman Catholic Church has changed sufficiently so as to render it an acceptable religious fellowship, no longer to be exposed as unbiblical but rather to be recognized as a legitimate church.

This perception, however, is fatally flawed. The Vatican Council II changed no fundamental doctrine of the Catholic Church. The changes made were cosmetic not substantive. Many years ago, James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore and a greatly-honored Roman Catholic leader, said that "the Catholic Church cannot be reformed The Church is not susceptible of being reformed in her doctrine (emphasis mine). The Church is the work of an Incarnate God. Like all God's works, it is, therefore, incapable of reform."⁴ It should be emphasized that Cardinal Gibbons was speaking of a change in doctrine, not a change in practice or worship. Were the Roman Catholic Church to say that it had erred in any doctrine, such an admission would effectively undermine its entire theological structure. Roman Catholic theology is built upon the foundational concept of papal infallibility and the absolute and binding authority of the "teaching church."

Stray remarks by priests, cardinals, or other leaders of Rome do not constitute Rome's official position. Much has been made of the fact that the numerous charismatics now found within the Roman Catholic Church are "more like evangelicals," and have some views that may not be compatible with historic Romanism. This may be true, but individual communicants within the Catholic Church do not determine the doctrinal basis of the Church. Roman Catholicism does not accept, as do Protestants, the right of individual biblical interpretation. Authoritative teaching comes through the Church and is incorporated in the collective body of Roman Catholic dogma that has collected over the centuries.

The infallibility of the Church. Romish doctrine affirms that the Roman Catholic Church has been divinely constituted as the final authoritative interpreter of Scripture, and as the sole propounder of Christian doctrine. One Catholic source puts it this way: Infallibility is "exemption or immunity

from liability to error of failure; (in particular) in theological usage, the supernatural prerogative by which the Church of Christ [Roman Catholic Church] is, by a special divine assistance, preserved from liability to error in her faith and morals.¹⁵

Final teaching authority rests in the Pope when he is speaking *ex cathedra* (from the chair of Peter as the official Teacher of the Church). "The pope takes the place of Jesus Christ on earth By divine right the pope has supreme and full power in faith and morals over each and every pastor and his flock. He is the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the entire church, the father and teacher of all Christians. He is the infallible ruler, the founder of dogmas, the author of and the judge of councils, the universal ruler of truth, the arbiter of the world, the supreme judge of heaven and earth, the judge of all, being judged by no one, God himself on earth."¹⁶

Baptism. Since baptism is viewed by most alleged Christian communions as the "door into the church," many evangelicals have trumpeted the fact that Rome apparently relaxed somewhat her views of the Church at Vatican Council II, allowing for the fact that non-Catholics might be members of the Church. However, one must remember that in the minds of Catholics this true Church subsists within the Church of Rome. The statement of the Trent Catechism, an official declaration of the Roman position, still stands: "Infants, unless regenerated unto God through the grace of baptism, whether their parents be Christians or infidel, are born to eternal misery and perdition."¹⁷ Attempting to deal with the horror of such a doctrine, Catholic theologians invented the "Limbus Infantum," a residence where infants who die without baptism exist excluded from heaven but without conscious pain.

The Catholic Church still maintains, as it always has, baptismal regeneration. Baptism is "the door or entrance to the spiritual life, through which we become members of Christ baptism is the source of spiritual rebirth."¹⁸ How can fundamental believers in good conscience recognize and cooperate with a church that believes people become Christians through baptism?

The Mass. Central to Catholic worship is the celebration of the Mass. Some non-Catholics mistakenly view the Mass as similar to the communion observance. It is not. "The Holy Mass is the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ really present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine, and offered to God for the living and the dead."¹⁹ The Mass is not merely a memorial of Christ's death.

"The Mass is a truly propitiatory sacrifice [by which] the Lord is appeased [and] . . . pardons, wrongdoing and sins Finally, the Mass is the divinely ordained means of applying the merits of Calvary. Christ won for the world all the graces it needs for salvation and sanctification. But these blessings are conferred

gradually and continually . . . mainly through the Mass The priest is indispensable since he alone by his powers can change the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. . . . The more often the sacrifice [of the Mass] is offered the more benefit is conferredⁿ¹⁰

Such teaching of course is a deliberate denial of the biblical doctrine of the finished work of Christ. Christ was "once [once for all] offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). To view persons who believe this as "Christian brethren" is to deny the very heart of the biblical gospel.

Penance. A chief cornerstone of Roman Catholic theology is the doctrine of penance. "Penance is the sacrament by which sins committed after baptism are forgiven through the absolution of the priest."ⁿ¹¹ Baptism, according to Catholic teaching, brings forgiveness of sins committed prior to the reception of that sacrament. However, for sins committed after that time there must be confession, contrition, and the satisfactory completion of any good works that are required to be performed. A Roman Catholic communicant, therefore, is constantly in bondage to the priest who alone can help him get rid of his sins.

Salvation. A Roman Catholic who follows the teachings of his church can never hope to have a certain knowledge of salvation. The Council of Trent placed a curse upon those who claim to have eternal salvation. "If anyone shall say that he who is once justified cannot lose grace . . . let him be accursed."ⁿ¹² Catholics deny salvation by grace through faith alone. This was one of the principal issues at stake in the Protestant Reformation. Both faith and works are necessary for salvation. "Good works are, therefore, the reason for which God gives the reward of eternal life."ⁿ¹³

Some may think that more recent Roman Catholicism has rejected some of these ideas concerning salvation. They have not. Witness this contemporary statement by Catholic teachers:

"Christ's death earned 'satisfactions and merits' which have been deposited into a 'Treasury' to which have been added the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary [and] the prayers and good works of all the saints From the most ancient times in the Church good works were also offered to God for the salvation of sinners Indeed [by] the prayers and good works of holy people . . . the penitent was . . . redeemed Following in Christ's steps, those who believe in him have always . . . carried their crosses to make expiation for their own sins and the sins of others. They were convinced that they could help their brothers to obtain salvation from God"ⁿ¹⁴

Obviously such doctrine is completely contrary to the New Testament. This fact, however, does not trouble the traditional Roman Catholic. The statement to follow, from an official Catholic source, shows why:

" When someone asks where the Catholic finds the substance of his belief, the answer is: from the living teaching authority This authority consists of the Pope and the bishops of the time, whose duty it is to promote the knowledge of revealed truth. The Catholic is thus freed from the necessity of personal investigation into doctrinal questions, and can live in a quiet certainty that the doctrine of the Church is the doctrine of Christ Himself."¹⁵

The Roman Catholic is not disturbed if a given doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. If it has been declared a bona fide doctrine by the magisterium, the teaching body of the Church, it can be accepted as authentic. While, particularly in America, this has been challenged on a practical level by many Catholics, it nevertheless remains the firm teaching of Rome. Again it must be kept in mind that the position of the Roman Catholic Church is not defined by popular opinion, or even clerical opinion, but by the specific directive of the bishops and the Pope.

IS CONTINUED SEPARATION FROM ROMAN CATHOLICISM A SIN?

In the official statement, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," the following statement is found: "We together, evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples." Upon reading this statement one must ask: is it a sin to remain separated from spiritual fellowship with the Catholic Church? Should we who are practicing such separation repent of our bias and embrace the Catholic Church as a true Church? This is what evangelical ecumenicists are bidding us do.

Through the centuries no group has stood stronger against cooperation with Roman Catholicism than Baptists. With what amazement then do we read the following account:

"Frank Ruff took his usual back-street shortcuts as he drove into the heart of the massive complex many call the 'Baptist Vatican.' 'Good morning, Father Frank,' called out security guard Richard Bennett, himself a Catholic, as Ruff entered the Southern Baptist Convention's executive offices. The priest's black clerical suit and Roman collar still stand out in a Southern Baptist crowd. But no one does a double-take as Ruff goes about his work as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' representative in the halls of Southern Baptist power. The big news, these days, is that cooperation between some leaders of America's 59 million Roman Catholics and 15 million Southern Baptists is becoming old news."¹⁶

Norman Geisler, well-known Christian apologist, was interviewed concerning his views on Catholic-evangelical cooperation. He concludes that "the differences are not as great as generally perceived and they are not as crucial. In my opinion, they don't involve heresy on either side of the fence."¹⁷ He was asked the question, "Is there a growing awareness among our fellow evangelicals of the theological common ground between themselves and Catholics?" His answer: "I would have to admit that more Evangelicals see the need to cooperate socially and ethically. That's good because it's forced evangelicals to reevaluate their relationship to Roman Catholics. But I see also a growing awareness of this doctrinal understanding. I had a conversation with a couple of noted evangelicals at the last Evangelical Theological Society meeting and they were in total agreement with what I am saying here."¹⁸

This is a frightening statement indeed! Not only does one of the leading evangelical theologians feel we should be accepting of Roman Catholicism, but he has many "buddies" who share his feelings. This bodes no good for thousands of young students as well as evangelical church members who will come under their influence. The perception will soon be widespread that we no longer need to oppose the heresies of Rome because they are not really "heresies."

JUST LEARN TO SAY "NO"

There are clear biblical principles that are being blatantly ignored by those who are promoting more rapport with Roman Catholicism .

Those teaching false doctrine should not be accepted but rather repudiated. Paul faced major theological deviations among the churches of Galatia. He faced the deviators in no uncertain terms. Their teaching was to be shunned. They were "accused" (Gal. 1:8). When the apostle Peter gave in to their erroneous accommodations, Paul "withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). He did not view the Judaizers nor their "evangelical" accomplices as having "fresh insights" or "exercising their rights as believer priests." He viewed their teaching as deadly and dangerous and took great pains to expose it.

Let us face the facts. Key doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are pure heresy. They are not supported by the Word of God. What should be the reaction, therefore, of those who would be true to the Lord? "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10-11). Notice that God views the teaching of false doctrine as an "evil deed." That teaching may come from suave even sincere and pleasing religious instructors. Some Roman Catholic leaders are "nice" people and talk about Christ and His work. We must not be led astray, however, from the main point. The main point is this: are they

teaching doctrines found in the New Testament? If they are not, we must reject them.

Those who rely on false ways of salvation are not to be viewed as "brothers and sisters in Christ." The major emphasis of Paul in writing to the Galatians was this: If anyone corrupts the pure gospel of Christ, adding to it any kind of works, that person is to be repudiated. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed"(Gal. 1:8-9). What were the Galatian Judaizers doing? They were saying that salvation by faith alone is not possible. Good works are meritorious and are necessary to earn salvation. As we have already seen, this is the exact teaching of Rome. They have not changed since the days when Martin Luther and other Reformers protested their corruption of the gospel. They have learned how to talk in ways that can seem convincing to gullible evangelicals, but they have not changed one iota their fundamental teaching in this area. Martin Luther went to Rome, while still a Catholic monk, and ascended the so-called "Pilate's stairs," the scala sancta, uttering pater noster (our Fathers) and praying for souls in purgatory. He hoped by these good deeds to help deliver suffering souls from that place of torment. Where did he receive such notions? From the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church! They are still teaching these things today.

Can persons who are depending upon good works (theirs or others) for assistance in attaining heaven be viewed scripturally as members of the Body of Christ, as truly born-again people? But, says someone, is it not possible that some Catholics are saved? No doubt this may be true, but some things need to be noted:

1. The number of such would be very few in comparison to the total number of Catholics.
2. A truly born-again person, taught by the Spirit, would be unable to remain in the bosom of such an apostate organization for long.
3. The presence of such within the Roman Church does not in any way suggest that the official teachings of that church are acceptable. Born-again people are found within the membership of rank liberal Protestant churches, but this does not condone the apostasy of the system to which they belong. They should get out and so should believers who are still affiliated with Romanism. It is woefully sad that such leaders as Billy Graham have told inquiring Catholics that they should not leave their church, but remain in it and seek to reform it.

The bottom line is this. If a person is not trusting in Christ's finished work alone for his or her salvation, then that person is not a Christian. We are saved, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy" (Tit. 3:5). Christ's sacrifice is complete and cannot be perpetuated or duplicated. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). The fact that he "sat down" underscores the completed nature of his work. Old Testament priests never sat down during the performance of their duties. This was because they always had something else to do. Christ has no more to do. He has done it all. To seek to add to what he has done by human good works is an insult to Him and a denial of scriptural teaching regarding His work.

The rescue of our society from its moral catastrophe is not a sufficient reason for disobeying clear teachings of the Word of God. "America is morally bankrupt. Those of us who believe in the Judeo-Christian heritage of morality must stand together. We cannot be divided by non-essential doctrinal differences. "This is the plea of many evangelicals today. It is also being heralded by some Roman Catholic leaders. This was the substance of the argument of a Catholic lawyer, William Bentley Ball, when he authored an article published in Christianity Today entitled, "Why Can't We Work Together?" The summary of the article says: "A noted Catholic lawyer urges Catholics and evangelicals to become partners in the battle against rampant secularism."¹⁹ In this same article, Ball says he is often asked by fundamentalist clients whether he has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. His answer reveals the terrible ignorance of the average Roman Catholic regarding the matter of the new birth. Ball replies: "The name of my parish, indeed, is Sacred Heart of Jesus--a reverent phrase loaded with the tenderest meaning. We . . . believe that we receive the actual body and blood of Jesus when we receive communion."²⁰ Here is a man--an educated, leading Roman Catholic layman--who believes he has accepted Christ as Savior because he receives the Holy Sacrament on a regular basis! Could there be a more eloquent testimony as to the reason why Catholics need to be evangelized--the very thing contemporary evangelical leaders are telling us we ought not to do! May God have mercy on His Church in these days of awful confusion!

Does the goal of rescuing America from the depths of moral bankruptcy into which it has fallen justify evangelicals in ignoring the blatant errors of Romanism, pronouncing orthodox and practicing Roman Catholics as true believers, and engaging with them in corporate worship? Should we minimize vast and vital theological differences in order to try to achieve a better standard of morality in our society? Many feel we should. This concept is reflected in the views of Norman Geisler, mentioned earlier, who is a noted evangelical theologian, having taught at both Dallas Seminary and Liberty University. His assessment of the relationship between evangelicals and Romanists is summed up in the title given to an interview which he had

on the subject: "If we don't hang together, we're going to hang separately"²¹

It is clear from Scripture that the primary task of the Church is not to reform society but to perpetuate and propagate the "faith once delivered to the saints." In good conscience we cannot abandon, compromise, or change the truths of God's Word on the plea that we are working with others toward rectifying society's ills. We are glad for those Roman Catholics who stand for the sanctity of life and oppose abortion. However, we cannot, because they hold such a position, overlook the monstrous errors of the Roman Church and brand its adherents as true believers. The genuine, Christ-honoring pastor is to be "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). Several important elements are found in this verse:

1. Sound doctrine is important and must be taught.
2. There are those who will oppose sound doctrine.
3. Sound doctrine must be strongly maintained and those systems that are contrary to it must be opposed.

Roman Catholics do not teach sound doctrine. They must be opposed, therefore, and their erroneous doctrines exposed.

To confirm Roman Catholicism as a valid expression of the Christian faith is to doom multitudes of Catholics to eternal hell. As we have already seen, Catholic doctrine does not set forth salvation by grace through faith alone. It adds works to faith as a necessary requisite of salvation. Jesuit theologian, Avery Dulles, tries to dance around issues carefully to as not to offend his mostly evangelical readers in an interview conducted by Christianity Today. Even he, however, admits there are great differences between what evangelicals believe about salvation and what Roman Catholics believe. Dulles notes, in speaking of "justification" that "after you are justified you can be more justified still" [a confusion of justification and sanctification]. He also states that "we can merit salvation provided that we persevere in grace. . . we do not boast that we've already been saved in the sense that we cannot be lost . . . so we hope we will be saved . . . it is not an absolute assurance."²² What a sad testimony is this, coming as it does from a leading theological mind of the Roman Church! We can only "hope we will be saved." Yet leading evangelical voices are telling us that there is no heresy involved in Roman Catholicism.

What do Roman Catholics need? They need to hear of the wonderful salvation Christ has offered through His finished work. They need to hear that it is possible to have complete assurance of salvation by resting in the promises of God's Word. They need to know that salvation is not through

the so-called "Holy Sacraments" but through faith alone apart from priestly intervention. If evangelicals begin viewing Roman Catholics as people who are already saved, they will cease to give them the gospel and thus condemn them to everlasting hell. This is a very serious implication of the "new theology" being propounded by evangelical leaders today.

The impact of this new position upon foreign missionary effort will be staggering. Many of our fundamental missionaries labor in predominantly Catholic countries where the majority of the converts through the years have come from the Roman Catholic Church. Will we now cease our efforts to evangelize these people? What will we tell the people who have already left Roman Catholicism, many at great sacrifice? Will we tell them that we were mistaken and that the Church in which they were born and raised is really a New Testament church after all? What confusion such an admission would bring! Have we wasted centuries of time and multiplied millions of dollars of the Lord's money in an effort to get people saved who are already saved?

The evangelical ecumenism represented in this movement of conciliation will be a menace to those local churches and institutions that are trying to be true to God's Word. Because of the eminence of many of the propagators of the current "evangelical ecumenism," many Christians will be influenced by what they say. Their line of reasoning has already begun to be popularized through the Christian media. Young students in colleges and seminaries will be infected by this notion. Pastors and other leaders who are seeking to "hold the line" for biblical truth will be placed under increasing pressure. They will be viewed as "troublemakers," and will be accused of an overly militant and loveless spirit. Furthermore, Roman Catholics who hear about this new approach (and they will definitely hear as their leaders trumpet the news abroad) will be increasingly resistant to the gospel and hostile to those who witness to them since they say, "We are not lost. We are part of the Body of Christ. Your own leaders say so. We do not need to be evangelized."

Cleverly-worded statements of what Catholics believe are already being made by their leaders with the intent to impress evangelicals and cause them to embrace the idea that Catholics really are not that different from true Bible-believers. Such a statement appeared in a Catholic periodical and was entitled, "Biblical Fundamentalism: How Should Catholics Respond?" Ten questions commonly asked by fundamentalists were addressed by Raymond Brown, a priest. The answers were worded in such away that those not thoroughly familiar with Catholic teaching would think favorably of them.²³ Such articles no doubt will continue to appear, written by representatives on both sides. Continuing and growing confusion will be the result.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, we must recognize that there are various elements

within the Roman Catholic Church. There are:

1. Liberals

These would be persons such as Hans Kung who has authored books critical of Roman Catholic teaching but who himself is not fundamental in his doctrines, but shares the viewpoints of liberal Protestants.

2. Traditionalists

These are the persons holding to the traditional doctrines of the Catholic Church.

3. Charismatics

Many Catholics have come under the influence of the contemporary charismatic movement and are practicing their views within the pale of Roman Catholicism. However, as one writer has noted, they have "varying degrees of concern about bringing their new-found faith into harmony with the church's teaching."²⁴

4. Cultural Roman Catholics

They were born into the Church and have an emotional tie (and often an ethnic one too) to the Catholic Church though their involvement is more cultural than theological.

The official position of the Catholic Church, however, is not mandated by such groups nor by individuals within these groups. The official position of the Catholic Church is enunciated by its official teachers. It is this collective authority of the Church's official teachers that becomes "Catholic doctrine." The Roman Catholic Church "regards itself as the instrument of the Paraclete-Spirit promised by Christ, which would take what he had given and guide Christians along the way of truth in subsequent times (John 16:13)."²⁵ In other words, the Catholic Church, embodied in its hierarchy, is the appointed "Teacher" for all Christians.

Are Roman Catholics truly "evangelicals?" One's answer to that question depends upon the importance one places upon New Testament doctrine. We are afraid David Wells was right when he wrote, "I see a faith which is being seriously eroded by assorted alliances with late 20th century culture. The upshot is that evangelicalism is now largely defined in terms of its experience rather than its truth. Since evangelical experience often sounds similar to Catholic experience, should theological differences be taken seriously or pressed unduly?"²⁶ To many evangelicals, the answer to this

question is "no." Such a spokesman as Kenneth Kantzer, noted author and former editor of Christianity Today, said we should "rejoice with the new-found evangelicals in the Roman Catholic Church" and that we should not "attack what we deem to be holdovers from Roman Catholic doctrine."²⁷ As long as visible evangelical leaders such as this promulgate the idea that we should not challenge and refute the multitudinous errors within Catholicism, we will continue to see an erosion in the doctrinal position of evangelicalism as a whole, and a rapid development of ecumenism.

We are reminded of the consternation of the apostle Paul when hearing of the intrusion of the legalizers into the churches of Galatia. The "false brethren" [those persons claiming to be "evangelicals" but who were not]. These people "came in privily [secretly, unobtrusively] to spy our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. 2:4). What was Paul's response to these persons, some of them illustrious, who sought to rob the gospel of its power? Paul said: "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:5). He said that even though some of them "seemed to be somewhat" [that is, seemed to be important], Paul said he would regard no one's person, but rather defend the faith against all comers. We must do the same today. Our command from King Jesus is still valid: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

END NOTES

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